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ABSTRACT

Classroom teachers in high school and college need communication skills beyond precise and dramatic lecturing. They must be willing to plan and ask searching questions meant to transform classrooms into dialogic and interpersonal places. Educators must halt the curricular production of passive stenographers and begin the work of assisting students with critical thinking and confident speaking. Various tactics for initiating instructional dialogue are reviewed, but the point that tactics alone are not sufficient is expressed. Projects that engage students over time will stimulate more animated and advanced content conversations than any batch of teacher controlled vocal tactics. Project models are described, along with a recent dialogue experiment conducted during a course. The paper concludes by suggesting that excuses for avoiding dialogic energies may come too easily for teachers. Such excuses include: content is too new, or too advanced, or students aren't ready, or there's not enough time, or you can't grade discourse. It is suggested that failure to advance classroom content dialogue is a failure of teacher vision. (Author/IAH)

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The paper concludes by suggesting that excuses for avoiding dialogic energies may come too easily for teachers. Such excuses include: content is too new, or too advanced, or students aren't ready, or there's not enough time, or you can't grade discourse, and so excuses continue. Failure to advance classroom content dialogue is suggested as a failure of teacher vision.

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DIALOGIC CLASSROOMS:
TACTICS, PROJECTS, AND ATTITUDE CONVERSIONS

In a 1990 journal article, I wrote, "Here's my conflict! I can't use pedagogy I no longer believe in. I've lost my compass as truth speaker to students." (Hauser, J., 1990) But initiating and sustaining classroom dialogue requires more than bolt of lightening conversions. Is it possible to successfully teach content and courses as an integrated series of dialogues? Should we be enablers of advanced content conversations instead of authorities in charge of content? In the process of becoming learners and thinkers, whose voices do we ignore, especially at the college level?

In recent years, I've tried to nurture students toward finding and voicing their own ideas. Newmann has urged teachers of Social Sciences to help students move beyond recited knowledge and into content dialogue. (Newmann, 1988) Conviction for less emphasis on recited knowledge was addressed powerfully, and years earlier, by Arthur Combs:

> "We are experts at giving people information. We have been doing that for years. It is the thing we know how to do best. Helping students discover the personal meaning of information is a very difficult matter and the source of most of our failure. The dropout, for example, is not a dropout because we didn't tell him or her. We did that over and over." (Combs, A., 1981)

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Faculty colleagues at St. Norbert College advanced classroom dialogue when they participated in a semester study of their dialogic efforts with students. They kept ongoing notes about their progress, then produced reflective papers as summations of those efforts. (Hauser, J. and Schoenebeck, K., 1989) One colleague observed that "...we are turning out stenographers rather than critical thinkers." (Smith, J. 1989) She expressed frustration at students frantically jotting lecture notes as teachers speak them.

> "In most instances, the physical act of placing pencil to paper causes the brain to react in two ways. First, the vocal cords are disengaged; one cannot write and speak at the same time. Second, the critical processing centers of the brain slide, click, or thunk into neutral; one cannot write and think at the same time. The implications of these two phenomena are frightening to a professor intent on generating student discussion. (Smith, J. 1989)

She required students to submit discussion questions for assigned readings. Notetaking during discussions was discouraged and in return she stopped giving traditional paper and pencil tests, using critical thinking and informal opinion papers instead. Success at her endeavor was sporadic, she confessed, but her paper concludes with a tint of satisfaction.

> "I have taken the pencils out of the hands of my students with mixed results. I will continue to experiment with ways of encouraging discussion and thought within the classroom. Surely the alternative, a generation of stenographers, makes the effort worthwhile." (Smith, J., 1989)

DIALOGIC CLASSROOMS - WHAT HAPPENS THERE?

Descriptions abound, but the following are worthy descriptions of what classroom dialogue includes:

- "...longer exchanges among students as well as between teacher and students, and questions soliciting student opinions and thoughts not just right answers." (Stodolsky, S., Ferguson, T. L., and Wimpelberg, K., 1981)

- "...student-student interaction ... calls for complex thinking processes and attitude change." (Gall, M. D., and Gall, J. P., 1976)

- "...various activities in which teacher and students discuss what they don't know..." (Dillon, J. T.)

- "...where the students listen to and speak with one another, where every utterance is not mediated by the teacher." (Comber, Zeiderman, and Maistrellis, 1989).

High school and college students vocally dominate classrooms without realizing it. McNeil(1988) conducted research with high school Social Studies teachers and found that they reduced potentially open issues to "...lists of facts, names, places, events, laws, and the like." McNeil proposed that such teachers maintained "...authority over content" and felt uncomfortable with "inefficiencies" attributed to classroom discourse. Caren and Sund (1971) refer to teachers' need "...to listen and question at just the right place." But more than practiced listening is possible. Vocal prompts can also be practiced by teachers. Examples include:

- "Are there other ways to view this?"

- "What are some of your thoughts?"

- "Help me out with your feelings about this."

- "I´m concerned about that too. Can you say more?"
- "I keep changing my mind about this problem. How about some of you?"
- "Can someone take that further?"
- "That might be true, but is there more to it?"
- "I´m following you, but something seems missing."
- "Keep going; I think you´re convincing me."
- "I think you´re convincing me."

The use of wait-time, meaning a prolonged pause after one´s own comment or those of students, should be valued as a worthy adjunct to vocal cues.

THEATRICAL TEACHERS:

We can animate students with facial expressions, gestures, eye contact, body movement, and vocal tactics. Some believe that how we move in classrooms, stand, hold our hands, our facial expressions, whether we lean or stand straight, or whatever our bodies do, is witnessed by students and directly or covertly advance dialogue. Collins (1976) advises: "...uplifting, varied vocal delivery..." and "...dancing, wide-open eyes."

But should teachers learn acting techniques to generate student responses? One study (Rubin, 1977) pursued that question by arranging for graduate theatre students to teach dramatic, provocative, and even "...seductive, sexy techniques" to classroom teachers, then judge the success of

those teachers with student dialogue. The conclusion included:

> "...some of the finest teachers managing truly superb classrooms were not particularly good actors and actresses. Other than achieving a slight reduction of histrionic inhibitions, teaching teachers to play roles seemed to have limited value." (Rubin, 1977)

We may want to believe in the power of attractive teachers, skilled in movement, gesture, and vocal drama, to produce high quality discourse. In fact I confess to occasional theatrics. I may quarrel vocally with myself, taking a view, then rejecting it. What's happening to him, some students, dismayed by uncertainties, may wonder. Hopefully they come to understand that such drama is not for itself, but meant to suggest that facts and concepts, even from experts, can be questioned or challenged. Such belief can be advanced by nontheatrical teachers as well.

ENGINEERING DIALOGUE:

> "You should know exactly what questions, word for word, you are going to use... and perhaps even who you are going to ask... Build your question outline at least as many layers deep as your content outline... I would suggest a syllabus that errs on the side of complexity and length." (Welty, W. M., 1988)

I oppose this view because I don't believe that content dialogues can be engineered or scripted. True discourse will not accommodate lists of must-cover questions. Such a focus will suppress honest student expressions. To know a complicated set of questions in advance and try to cover them will prompt recitation, but much more is being argued for.

Carefully crafted dialogue is an oxymoron. Such tactics might produce vocal spurts of student compliance, but not free and sustained student sharing of questions and values. Scripting of dialogue suggests that the teacher is an accountant, or even magic show sharpie in command of tricks performed for an audience held in low regard. If the goal is to conduct an exam rehersal, such scripting may have a place. But truthful dialogues require flexible and truthful teachers who believe knowledge is advanced in a communication trust shared by students and teachers.

SPACE AND EQUIPMENT:

Sources call for adequate space in front of and around the chamber for the discussion leader to "rove." I can't resist images of teachers flitting about like Phil, Oprah, or Geraldo. "Participants must be able to see and talk to each other. The leader must be able to physically move to any part of the room and to any student." (Welty, W. M., 1988) Also recommended are vast arrays of electronic wizzardry, classroom shapes, projectors, flip charts, colored chalk, easels and swivel chair desks.

But I've witnessed teachers sustain dialogue where none of the above existed. When students and I are in dialogue, what surrounds us and where or what we sit on are not very consequential. I may use a chalkboard or projector, but don't need to. Though tapes, VCRs, and other machines offer

certain conveniences, I haven't found them crucial for classroom dialogues. I seldom "rove," like a talk show denizen, from student to student, though I know a dialogic teacher who does this successfully. I do prefer a group circle whenever possible for eye contact and feelings of student and teacher mutuality.

The work of William Glasser on "classroom meetings" (Glasser, W., 1969) should be carefully reviewed if seating and eye contact questions are raised. Might idea sharing by persons in a circle, where facial expressions, eye contact, and body language are shared, be superior to the frequent and impersonal seats-in-a-row version, where voiced opinions come from unseen faces in various corners of a chamber?

A DIALOGUE EXPERIMENT OF MY OWN

Recently a group of twenty-eight students and myself experimented with a discourse design. We spent the final five weeks of a semester in careful reading and group dialogue with a specific trade book that focused on brain compatible teaching. Each class began with our arranging of seats into a large circle. Then a specific lead group of four or five students and myself - every lead group had me - started dialogue about the chapter assigned for that day. Class began with the lead group discussing concepts among themselves, but amid the rest of us, for five or ten minutes,

then the group at large entered the dialogue for the rest of the hour.

Prior to each large group dialogue session, there was careful lead group training where chapter content discourse techniques, and various possible challenges were discussed under my guidance. A very important goal of the advance preparation was for the lead groups to become confident and knowledgeable about how to pull the group at large into advanced content conversation within the first five minutes of the period. In the training sessions, questions usually raised were:

- Should there be a lead group chair and, if so, who will chair the dialogue?

- How will the lead group begin their dialogue?

- What are the essential content ideas needing large group discussion?

- How will lead group members invite or coaxe group at large students into discourse?

- Should lead group members resolve to cover certain ideas "for sure?"

- Should there be a summation toward the end of the period and who should do it?

These and other questions guided lead group planning of dialogues and decisions about primary and secondary content goals. The book was covered, except for a final chapter, and

specific essay questions, created by myself, became the examination. In our next go-around, I will have lead group students submit essay questions for examination use.

Experiment with this dialogue model created a series of animated sessions. The purpose of our final course meeting was to vocally critique our content mastery and discourse efforts. Student support for this model was positive and written assessments submitted by the students further confirmed their approval.

STUDENT PROJECTS:

Dialogic teaching is powerfully driven by curriculum projects, explorations, and group dialogue models. Motivating such events should occupy teacher planning time and energy, at least the equal of what is allocated to lecture and recitation. The advantages of student productions, displays, and performances reside in the group interactions that flow from them. Such student endeavors will create and sustain high level curriculum dialogues without need of frequent teacher prompting. Examples of individual and group projects likely to stimulate high level curriculum conversations include:

- skits created, rehersed and performed in classrooms.

- panel presentations, guided by teachers, but planned, chaired, and evaluated by students.

- creation of simulations, models, maps, graphs, and

other idea or issue projects.

- student reactors who individually master ideas from required readings or other sources and describe their personal reactions to the group-at-large.

- classroom dialogues conducted by "lead groups" of four or five students assigned to master the content in advance and stimulate group-at-large discourse.

- students keeping journals or constructing portfolios to record episodes and ideas for future recall and group dialogue.

- projects where something is actually constructed or assembled from materials to concretely assist understanding of curricular content.

- assessment scales created by students for future application to their own work and the work of others.

- survey forms devised by students to collect information for analysis and synthesis.

Such student endeavors have the advantage of being self-directed and dialogic student work. They are time and effort investments that will stimulate dialogue because more than teacher controlled requirements are at stake. Student work, sweat, and time are the dialogue motivators, which means that teachers need not rely on verbal artiface to jump-start dialogue.

HOW WILL WE KNOW WHEN IT HAPPENS

Our intuitions about why and when dialogue occurs may not be sharp, but there a signs of communication wellness that may help teachers recognize classroom dialogue as it occurs. (Nummella Cain and Cain, 1991) Included are students:

- working to initiate and sustain vocal action.
- expressing creative and critical insights and apparently enjoying that process.
- dealing with dissonant ideas.
- discussing their own reasoning.
- striving to clearly express themselves.
- offering and reacting to thematic ideas, rather than obscure or memorized details.
- sustaining dialogue with little teacher prompting.
- appearing eager to voice opinions without needing to carefully write them in notebooks.
- asking each other questions.
- not expressing concern about what content will appear on future tests.
- willing to express what makes sense to them and what doesn´t.
- appearing relaxed and open enough to change views or accept other viewpoints.

YOUR MIND IS IN CHARGE. IT DICTATES

Students can hear teacher talk, take copious notes, and give it back on written tests. They do that from primary through college classrooms with little critical or creative thinking. But how often does advanced classroom dialogue occur? Given that research strongly portrays the human brain as intensely social (Gazzaniga, 1985), shouldn't it be occurring more often? When will we discard our addiction to information telling and take on dialogic pedagogy?

We excuse ourselves from dialogic teaching with various comments including: The content is too advanced... The students aren't advanced enough... You can't discuss these facts... My content doesn't lend itself... There's not enough time ... You can't grade that kind of work... And so our excuses continue. At inservice meetings, when teachers challenge me to change their minds or show them how, I can only reply that *I can't show them how*, yet insist that no academic content should be considered dialogue resistent. I refer to other teachers in the same content areas who are working at dialogic classrooms. But I can't show them how because each of us has to create that vision for ourselves. What I usually do is quote a line from the novel, Dream Science by Thomas Palmer. In it one of the characters says to a skeptic:

> "The thing to remember is that your mind is in charge. It dictates. Any life you can imagine is the life you can live." (Palmer, T., 1990)

Professional excellence requires an internal picture of ourselves performing well - an imagined beacon that energizes us by blinking, I'm here! I'm here! Keep following! All knowledge of pedagogy may be secondary to seeing ourselves in an alternative paradigm. Could our failures to advance dialogic teaching, or other forms of teaching excellence, be failures of imagination - failures of teacher vision?

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